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ABSTRACT

An experienced teacher, certified in the education of the gifted, designed and implemented a practicum that offered opportunities for enhancing the cultural literacy and creative play of preschool children who received little individual, reading-related attention from their working parents and caregivers. Play that enriched the imaginative capacities of children was seen as promoting success in and positive attitudes toward reading. Goals of the practicum were to: (1) increase individualized reading and nurturing time for children in the program; (2) increase parents' and preschool staff members' awareness of the value of creative play; and (3) promote participants' commitment to incorporation of reading and creative play into children's lives. Implementation of the practicum involved establishment of a lending library at the preschool, invitations to parents to participate in a daily or weekly reading program geared to develop children's literacy, and the use of newsletters to inform parents of the results of ongoing research on play. Ten methods that parents can use to cultivate their children's creativity are listed. Practicum evaluation data suggest that participants took pride in their involvement in the program and that the program should be continued. Related materials, such as newsletters, are appended. (RH)

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# PRACTICUM REPORT

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# Advocating Cultural Literacy and Creative Play for Youngsters Through a Preschool Lending Library Parent Participation Program

by

Susan Fay Ryan

Cluster XXV

A Practicum I Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program
in Early and Middle Childhood
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1989

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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January 4, 1989

This practicum report was submitted by Susan Fay Ryan under the direction of the advisor listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

September 4, 1989
Date of Final Approval of Report

Approved: Polly Peterson, Ph.D.
Polly Peterson, Ph.D., Advisor

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ABSTRACT

Advocating Cultural Literacy and Creative Play for Youngsters Through a Preschool Lending Library Parent Participation Program. Ryan, Susan Fay, 1989: Practicum Report, Nova University Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood.
Descriptors: Childhood Attitudes/Childrens Literature/Creative Play/Creativity/Early Childhood Education/Cultural Literacy/Early Experience/Early Reading/Emergent Literacy/Fantasy/Illustrations/ Imagination/ Intellectual Development/Learning Readiness/Library Services/ Literacy/Literature Appreciation/Oral Language/Parent Child Relationship/Parent Influence/Parent Participation/Parent Role/Parent Teacher Cooperation/Pictorial Stimuli/Picture Books/Prereading Experience/Preschool Children/ Preschool Education/Reading Ability/Reading Aloud to Others/Reading Attitudes/Reading Comprehension/Reading Habits/Reading Readiness/ Reading Research/Reading While Listening/Story Reading/Story Telling/Teacher Role/Young Children

This practicum was designed to offer opportunities to enhance cultural literacy and creative play for youngsters deprived of enriching literary experiences because of necessary full-time preschool attendance resulting in limited individual attention from their primary caregivers. The first goal centered around increasing individualized reading/nurturing time for children in the program. The second goal aimed for awareness on the part of parents and preschool personnel as to the value of creative play. As a third goal, the writer hoped that by the end of 12 weeks, all adults involved in the project would demonstrate an enthusiastic commitment toward incorporating reading and creative play into the lives of the children on a continuing basis.

To solve the problem, the writer/practitioner established a lending library at the preschool inviting parent participation in a daily/weekly reading program geared to develop their children's emerging literacy. The writer emphasized the importance of parents as reading role models and the effectiveness of daily story sessions at the preschool. In addition to engaging in appropriate literary-related activities at the child-care center, the writer shared with parents results of her research on play via newsletters she entitled PLAY: PARENTS as LITERACY ADVOCATES for YOUNGSTERS. The writer presented 10 relevant methods to assist parents with cultivating their children's creativity leading to thinking in the realm of the abstract.

As parents and caregivers became more active in the reading/nurturing process, children delighted in literature classics, rich in symbolism, imaginative content, and fanciful, artistic appeal. During the implementation period, preschool personnel and parents took pride in their involvement with the PLAY program, and after its completion indicated a strong desire for the program to continue.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### Description of Community

The setting of the practicum implementation was a licensed child-care center located in a southeastern Florida coastal town with a population of 34,926 year-round residents. The town has a total of seven licensed child-care facilities. The town's population is increasing at a rate of 9.5% per year. In terms of age groups, the town is comprised of 18% senior citizens (65 and over) 22% middle-aged persons (45-64), 36% young adults (20-24), 11.8% children (10-19), 6% children (5-9), and 6% children (5 and under). All socioeconomic levels were represented at the day-care facility; however, the majority of children came from lower middle and middle class homes. The site of the facility is one-half acre of land in a quiet area of the town's oldest section. Near the front end of the building were residential dwellings. Behind the building were three commercial enterprises, two of which specialize in the sale of second-hand furniture. The building was a simple concrete block structure with two front entrances and two back exits which open out to two play areas surrounded by four-foot high chain link fences. The play areas were

segregated according to age. In the area for younger children (2 and 3-year-olds) were three molded plastic swings, two springing seats that swivel, one free-standing minibasketball hoop and net attached to a six-foot post, and two enormous tires designed for children's play lying flat on the ground. One large tree was in the middle of the play area. On the other side of the preschool play area was a section for older children (3 and 4-year-olds) partitioned off by a portion of chain link fence and a dividing gate. The play equipment consisted of four eight-foot metal tunnels open on either end, one double slide, two tires for playing: one lying flat on the ground, one standing up straight; and three sets of apparatus which permitted four children to sit and rotate in a circle as if driving a car. Several tall trees shaded the play area.

Inside the entrance of the building was a vestibule with an office off to the left side. Separated from the entry by a Dutch door with the top half open was a large 40' x 30' room designated for the schools' 2-year-old population. At the rear of the room behind a long counter divider was a kitchen area where the director prepared hot meals each day. Beyond that room was another room of equal size which was designated for 3 and 4-year-old youngsters. Adjacent to the first room to its left was a 30' x 15' room which housed the infant population (age 0 to 2 years).

Dutch doors separated each age-group room from the other. Several children enrolled in grade school (up to the age of 12) attended the day-care facility before and after school. Seventy children attended the school at maximum capacity. The building gave an impression of spaciousness.

At the time that the practicum took place, the director of the facility was a thirty-three year old mother of five public school children ranging in age from seven to seventeen years old. The woman had worked in child care operations since she was a high school student when she married and chose not to continue her formal education. The business was a family one, having been run for many years by her mother-in-law. She had been managing the preschool with some assistance from her husband for three years. Her philosophy in regard to preschool education was, "Kids have to be kids." She did not wish to "push education" in terms of rigid goals. Several children had enrolled at her facility because they could not handle the highly structured educational thrust of other local preschool programs. The owner subscribed to and incorporated a mail order learning packet into the children's daily routine. Arts and crafts activities were included with the material. Calm, caring, and organized, the director displayed excellent rapport with children, parents, and her staff.

## Writer's Role and Responsibilities

The writer who implemented the practicum is a mother of five children ages seventeen to twenty-seven years old. Born and educated in the Northeast, she was graduated from a liberal arts college earning a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in political science. For post graduate work she earned a Master of Science degree in journalism. She completed additional coursework certifying her at the middle and secondary school level, Grades 6 - 12 in journalism and English. Additionally she holds an Educational Specialist degree with a major in the field of Gifted Child Education which certifies her to teach Kindergarten - Grade 12. She is a Junior Great Books leader and has completed training programs, TEACH: Teacher Effectivenss and Classroom Handling, and STEP: Systematic Training for Effective Parenting. The writer has been a teacher for fifteen years. Her experience ranges all ability levels: Basic, Regular, Advanced, and Gifted. Most of her teaching time has been spent at the junior high school level teaching language arts at an inner-city school. From 1986-1988, she worked at that same inner-city school with two alternative programs whose primary goal was dropout prevention. One was funded by the state; the other by private corporations. Both programs were operated within a large county school board system. Many disruptive students were enrolled in each program. The

writer observed that the students in the alternative programs were lacking a background in children's literature. That cultural void left them without listening skills, inhibited their creative thinking processes, and imposed general restrictions on their reading ability. Their powers of concentration were minimal.

In an effort to close that gap, the writer wrote and earned a grant from a local education foundation which supplied her program with a library of children's literature of the writer's choice. Her selections were made on the basis of the books' classic symbolism, their highly creative content, and their colorful, artistic appeal. The writer organized an innovative reading program in which seventh and eighth grade alternative students read to 3 and 4-year-old preschoolers in the Title XX program located at the same school site. The most noticeable result of having a children's library housed in the alternative program was the calming effect the books had on the teen-age disrupters. They became able to sit for several hours at a time previewing and enjoying the books on their own before reading them to the younger children. The reading program had in fact added a new dimension to the term "behavior modification." An equally positive effect could be observed in the attitudes of preschoolers as they looked forward to the reading adventure sessions with the junior high level

students. The writer learned that the majority of preschoolers received little or no individualized reading time in their home setting. Seeing that children are instilled with a love of reading at a young age remains of top priority with the writer. As a doctoral student in the field of Early/Middle Childhood, she continued to pursue that vision at the child-care facility where she worked with preschoolers on a reading/creativity enhancement program.

# CHAPTER II

# STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

## Description of the Problem Situation

Many children in the preschool program at the child-care center do not receive sufficient individualized reading/nurturing time and individual creative play time needed to lay a strong foundation for cultural literacy. All of the children attend the preschool program while their primary caregiver is employed. They are in attendance approximately nine hours per day: 7:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., five days per week.

A number of factors contribute to the problem:

1. In general, working parents of the preschoolers do not have time or training to meet the needs of their youngsters' emergent literacy.

2. Preschool child-care providers have limited time to offer individualized literary-related activities for the children in their care.

3. The number of children's books at the preschool center is in small supply.

4. Parents have no time to visit local libraries with their children.

5. Library services do not extend to the child-care center; books need to be made accessible to parents and children.

## Documentation of the Problem

The fact that the problem exists was documented by recording the results of the following investigative procedures:

The writer interviewed the director of the day-care facility to obtain information for assessment of the children's reading readiness capabilities. The director was also asked to identify children who seemed to need more attention than others and who appeared not to be receiving enough attention in the home. Such children had exhibited outward signs of disruptive or withdrawn behavior which made them good candidates for a reading behavior modification program.

The writer administered a simple oral/pictorial questionnaire to the preschoolers in order to ascertain their knowledge of children's literary characters which could not have been gleaned from either television or movie viewing.

The writer surveyed the parents of the preschoolers to determine as a rule how much time they spent in reading to their children and how much opportunity was afforded to the

children in the home for creative play. Information about the parents' own reading habits was obtained here in addition to significant correlations as to their emphasis on reading to the children.

## Analysis of the Causes

Economics is a major cause of the problem in that families need or believe they need two incomes to maintain their standard of living. When women do not stay home to care for their children, day care becomes a way of life for the children.

Career fulfillment for women is another reason that women enter the employment market and require the services of day-care centers.

Even though a child-care facility maintains an adequate staff as required by law, the staff is unable to provide large blocks of individual attention for each child; group activities are the norm. The writer believes that in most cases, a day-care upbringing cannot compare favorably to proper individualized nurturing by the primary caregiver.

School records indicate that many of the children come from single-parent homes. They do not have the "luxury" of receiving attention from two parents.

Time combined with the economic factor is another major cause of the problem. With children in day care, there is

often not enough time at home for weary, working parents to become effective nurturers of creativity and play.

Society's emphasis on television viewing along with a lack of reading habits on the part of parents is also germane to the problem. Parents need to be aware of the power entrusted to them as reading role models and how they can influence their children's lifetime reading patterns. Many parents do not realize the importance of reading regularly to their children, and unfortunately, have not been trained to recognize high quality literary content in children's books. Furthermore, parents are often unfamiliar with authors who produce award-winning literature. At best, their children's literary menu has been a meager one; their diet deficient.

A lack of knowledge on the part of parents about the value of creative play is also a cause of the problem. Insight into recent research studies on play could offer assistance to parents on why creative play is needed and how it can be provided.

## Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

The curious phenomenon of child's play has become a subject for detailed observation and analysis. Play has been described in a variety of ways by educators, psychologists, and social scientists. Some of the following

phrases are used as key descriptors: play is pleasureable: play is spontaneous; play is nonliteral: play must be protected from its consequences. Above all, play is the most critical activity of children. Christie & Johnston (1983) emphasize that in the past ten years educators have become increasingly interested in the value of play as a formative tool of child development. Research studies continue to probe the domain of children's fantasy with an effort to explain or demonstrate that the eventual outgrowth of a child's playful, imaginative behavior is the creative, productive behavior of an adult contributing to a responsible society.

In an article called "Defending Young Children's Play as the Ladder to Literacy," Wolfgang & Sanders (1981) express their convictions of the strong correlations between play and the ability to read. They point out that " . . . in reading, meaning is indicated by interpreting abstract symbols, the precursors of which have been traced in imaginary play" (p. 118). They suggest that children who have been unable to learn to read with a traditional reading program may have been deprived of the opportunity for playful fantasizing in their preschool years. Furthermore, there are many children who appear to have the ability to read in the sense that they are able to repeat the words aloud or, to phrase it in another way, they are able to

'decode' the words. Such children, however, are not gaining meaning from the printed word; their comprehension has not been translated into the abstract. (Foss & Hakes, 1979, cited in Wolfgang & Sanders, p. 118) They, too, may not have engaged in representational play as a stepping stone toward being fully literate. The essence of reading is that communication happens when no other person is present. "Reading should be viewed as . . . the top rung on the ladder of representational growth. Early developmental states of symbolic play then may be seen as means of moving up the rungs of the ladder" (Wolfgang & Sanders, 1981, p. 118).

Three categories of experiences that may lend themselves best to the nurturing of creativity and the stimulation of play involve art, music, and movement. Ironically, it is those specific types of enriching experiences that are often being excluded from the curriculum in schools due to a lack of funding or due to a prevailing philosophy which considers them unimportant. The recurrent theme of "back to basics" should not be permitted to eliminate the realm of the abstract. On the contrary, a child's basic curriculum from the early years,

" . . . should include aesthetic experiences that encourage play" (Manning & Sharp, 1977, cited in Christie & Johnson, p. 112). The authors point out that as

play is incorporated into 'traditional curriculum,' the intellectual rewards are signifigant. When a playful approach is considered as a serious contender in vying for a place in academia, a major accomplishment in the field of education will have been achieved. Ultimately, society will have been blessed with a world wherein each adult will have the capacity to offer " . . . a more creative understanding of content or solution to a problem" (Manning & Sharp, 1977, cited in Christie & Johnston, p. 112).

The value of play extends as well into the field of science. Severeide (1984) reports that " . . . a review of educational and psychological research suggests that play and science are complementary aspects of problem solving" (p. 58). She stresses the importance of including play in children's early experiences in science. It lays the groundwork for the intellect to become more fully operational allowing it to explore and test a range of hypotheses. "The primary value of play is that it serves as the basis for later cognitive functioning. In the freedom of play a child can momentarily suspend judgement, pursue a solution, and maintain a positive attitude towards alternatives" (p. 58). Three strengths or qualitites needed in solving scientific problems are fluency, flexibility, and motivation. Sylva, Bruner, & Genova (1984) state in their research that play can be credited as a key factor in

developing those qualities. Fluency, the capacity to generate a high volume of ideas, can trace its origins back to children's 'make-believe' play. In such type of play a child gets practice in ". . . making associations, recognizing attributes, using clues offered by the context, and interpreting imagery" (cited in Severeide, 1984, p. 59). Flexibility permits a child to envision a host of solutions and strategies as opposed to a child who is locked into a rigid narrow-minded focus which offers no options. Researchers believe that children who stem from a structured play system lacking in creativity will be severely limited in their critical thinking skills and in their problem solving ability. Motivation is a seemingly magical quality which when possessed by a student allows him/her to express high levels of spontaneity, enthusiasm, independence, and self-directedness. Make-believe play with objects, actions, or situations has been found to produce high motivational yields. Smilansky (1984) labelled certain types of children's play as unproductive: 1) if it was repetitive, 2) if it led to a dead end, and 3) if the child flitted from one activity to another without concentration. In conclusion, teachers need to be skilled in seeing that play is being carried out appropriately. Their role is not to be a player, but to be a guide. "Playful teaching is like the

study of science itself in that it is both creative and deliberate . . . the teacher who masters the techniques involved will help children develop minds that are open to the world of science" (cited in Severeide, 1984 p. 60).

Egan (1985) indicts the education profession for excluding the realm of the imagination in both theory and practice. Formal lip service may be paid to the art of creativity and the probing of the imaginative mind, but the fact remains that there are no ongoing extensive research programs that are being funded and tapped for the benefit of children in our schools. He refers in general to certain "ad hoc principles" which have been the mainstay of the educational system in terms of the design of curriculum and the practice of teaching. Specifically, he objects to the principles because they are rooted in the belief that knowledge is the process of moving from the concrete to the abstract, from the simple to the complex, and from the known to the unknown. He asserts that the ideas of Piaget have been relied upon heavily to support this type of rationale. Teachers have been taught that abstract or symbolic learning must originate with the manipulation of concrete objects. Believing that school systems have used a narrow-minded empirical approach to learning, Egan states that a disservice has been done to Piaget by way of excluding that portion of his work that dealt with the imagination.

> Imagination equals the act or power of forming mental images of what is not actually present . . . the influence of the ad hoc principles . . . has been to produce a curriculum and teaching methods that have excluded much of the richness of human experience that young children can have direct access to because it cannot be fitted to such an arid and impoverished image of the child. What cannot be directly tied to some simple content within the child's immediate experience has been increasingly forced out of the early school curriculum. We are treating young children as fools. Our early childhood curricula and practices are largely filled with trivia -- except where the imaginative work of individual teachers counters the influence of these principles. (p. 165)

Emphasizing that children are endowed with imaginative powers from birth, Egan (1985) stresses the importance of enriching early childhood academics with stimulating, challenging curricula that can serve to produce a child's fulfillment. Imagination must not continue to be a ". . . neglected tool of learning" (p. 166). Fantasy stories are a beginning; their application, however, extends to history, mathematics, science and beyond.

Responding to Egan, Greene (1985) indicates that her approach defines imagination as, " . . . what sees the meanings in the objects of which we become conscious in the course of our perceiving" (p. 170).

Reiterating his stand, Egan pronounces, "What a strange pass we have come to in the training of professional educators when we are expected to be familiar with much material of most dubious value . . . " (p. 174).

Noting that fantasy has often been looked upon as a trivial pursuit, Dehouske (1982) points out that it has in recent years been gaining in stature. "Contemporary cognitive theorists regard fantasy as a potentially productive, integrating, planful activity important to the day-to-day growth, development, and social maneuvering of all persons -- adolescents and adults as well as children" (p. 11). When channeled effectively, it can be used in problem solving, in guiding students to an awareness of themselves, and in helping people get along with others. It assists children to make the transition between the world of the concrete and the realm of the abstract. Those who have been identified as being high on the fantasy level have also been identified as higher in their level of tolerance to frustration, higher in their ability to concentrate, and generally higher in their level of self control. They are not as likely to demand instant gratification, and they have

been found capable of channeling their aggression to a verbal route rather than a physical one.

"Play is the means by which young mammals acquire the skills they will need to survive as independent adults. Little wonder that humans, who have the most to learn, are the most playful animals of all" (Gray & Chanoff, 1984, p. 609). These researchers advocate fantasizing as a necessary element of behavior and remark that the traditional school has not provided the proper atmosphere for nourishing a pupil's playful nature. Many preschool day-care facilities and kindergartens offer programs so structured that they have placed creativity on an endangered attribute list. Concerned educators are making their views known as a precautionary measure so that program revisions will be made. The Early Childhood and Literacy Development Committee of the International Reading Association (1986) has listed the following problems with pre-first grade programs: Rigid programs may offer unsuitable experiences and hold up unrealistic expectations for children of that age level. More attention is needed in regard to children's individual needs and more awareness of individual styles of learning. Accelerated programs force undue pressures on many children so that they fail to become risk takers; as a consequence, they may lack the motivation or courage to experiment with the intricacies of language development.

Language deficits may be the result. More emphasis needs to be placed on the integration of reading with writing and listening rather than on the development of isolated skills. Because not enough time is allotted for pleasure reading, children may have negative feelings toward reading -- instead of viewing it as a source of enjoyment. Most importantly, the quality and content of such pre-first grade programs are injurious to the children in that they discourage curiosity, critical thinking, and creative expression. (cited in The Reading Teacher, p. 820) These warnings cannot be ignored.

Henniger (1987) is convinced that, " . . . childhood play provides many excellent opportunities for learning fundamental concepts and developing appropriate attitudes toward . . . important disciplines. One significant component of play is the mental ability to manipulate symbols" (p. 168). As they become familiar with the use of symbols, children are preparing themselves for future academic success. The use of symbols in play is a forerunner to the use of symbols in the fields of mathematics and science. In a study of parental influences on reading, Ninio & Bruner (1978) report similar findings, ". . . parental reading to the child can stimulate imagination and help the child understand written words long before recognizing them. It supports or scaffolds the

labeling of objects and has a strong potential for language development" (p. 816). Neuman and Prowda (1982) are emphatic, "Reading for pleasure, associated with positive reading performance, should continue to be emphasized in the school curriculum as well as at home" (p. 670). Greaney (1986) also recognizes the powerful role that parents and teachers play in grooming a child for literacy. He notes that in the early years picture books are an important ingredient in language development. From then on, there is a progression of meaningful steps.

> It is the task of parents and the school to help make encounters with print satisfying and pleasurable, thereby introducing the young person to a new world of adventure and ideas which can both illuminate and change his or her future life. (p. 817)

Singer & Singer (1985) who have completed extensive studies in the area of children's fantasy over a period of years proclaim its virtues, "Making believe and pretending are among the wonders of the experience of being human . . . children's play includes . . . a vast array of potential or even impossible behaviors that . . . hint at the limitless range of the human imagination" (p. 1). Their research has demonstrated that men and women who have proven themselves to be creative achievers have evolved from

childhoods rich in fantasy. It is vital to realize the imaginative role which their parents played in their upbringing by involving them in an expanse of storytelling and pantomime experiences. Children's literature can be the vibrant springboard which sets play in motion. Sociodramatic play using stories as a base offers an excellent way to initiate creative play. Children experience the art of role playing as they become immersed in their pretending. Parents or teachers may need to be the instigators of such games, by telling the stories repeatedly or reading them aloud several times, but they also need to know when to step back and let the child or group of children be on their own without adult intrusion.

> A great deal of important learning takes place in these games, for the child not only hears of new roles, but also learns to accommodate to the demands of a game or to the ebb and flow of the mood of a small group. . . The advantage of sociodramatic play is that the child who tries out a great range of roles and has an extended store of make-believe for his or her play will be better prepared for novelty and difference in later life. (p. 46)

The praises of role playing in conjunction with reading aloud activities have been extolled by Trelease (1982), "It is through fiction's escapism -- putting ourselves in the place of Snow White or Casey at the Bat or Mike Mulligan -- that we stimulate the soul of creativity: the imagination. And it is this role playing that leads us to an awareness of others and, most importantly, of ourselves" (p. 27). The read-aloud advocate urges parents to cultivate the habit for the additional benefit of language development. The world of literature is the storehouse of expression from which a child takes what he/she hears, internalizes it, practices it, and becomes literate.

Functional illiteracy is a topic of great public concern. Even more concern may need to be expressed about the plight of aliteracy. "Aliterate persons know how to read but choose not to" (Maeroff, 1982, cited in Neuman, 1982, p. 335). Both adults and children fall victim to this problem rooted in apathy. In a frightening article entitled "Literature in Crisis," Farrell (1981) indicates a consistent preference of Americans for viewing over reading (p. 14). The research of Moody (1980) prompted her to state unequivocally that " . . . we are spawning a generation of semiliterates . . . there is no longer the traditional

reverence for reading that existed prior to the development of television as an integral part of our daily lives" (pp. 60-61). Television does not require the continuity of thought required by reading. Viewers' minds are programmed in "short takes" to which continued indoctrination at an early age impacts negatively upon attention span. In recent years classroom teachers have observed a drastic change in reading readiness patterns of kindergarten-age children. Experiments which have cut down on television viewing for a target group and substituted a reading program have demonstrated positive results in the area of reading improvement and increased listening ability. (p. 64)

Referring to the antisocial aspect of television, T. S. Eliot portrayed it as ". . . a medium of entertainment which permits millions of people to listen to the same joke at the same time and yet remain lonely" (cited in Trelease, 1980, p. 94). Accommodating for the permanency of television, Singer & Singer (1985) state that based upon their research parents can with effort still work to ensure that viewing becomes a positive, social experience. If parents watch the medium with their children, they can discuss presentations and use them as a basis for spinning off to their own self-created fantasies. These researchers urge parents and teachers to become "partners in play" with

the children in their lives so that " . . . we may see the flourishing of a new period of imagination and creativity in young and old alike" (p. 80). No apology is needed for children's literature; there is a dramatic plea, however, for educators to return to preschoolers the emergent cultural literacy that is rightfully theirs.

In writing of the widespread establishment of preschool programs as a permanent part of the education system of the future, Bloom (1981) poses serious questions as to which educational goals and values will take priority. He believes it is a mistake for educators to use those years in an effort to give children from any culture a headstart on the three "Rs." He insists that the early childhood years should be set aside for "learning to learn" rather than focusing on specific academic skills. Bloom emphasizes that in the crucial years of childhood, the child's social and emotional development is of prime importance. He remarks that in other countries there is much emphasis on cooperation in the learning process whereas in this country the emphasis is on competition. "The school . . . and the classroom . . . are regarded as a special environment in which students learn that they are part of an extended family . . . . Our schools are rather lonely places for many students" (p. 147).

Firm in their conviction that making friends and learning the art of cooperation remain a priority for preschoolers, Adcock & Segal (1983) address the topic in terms of global implications, " . . . it is essential for the future of our culture . . . . Indeed, in a world that threatens to destroy itself through aggression, the development of cooperation assumes a critical urgency" (p. 7).

Preschool activities should abound in opportunities for fanciful play and cooperation. On a larger scale, cooperation between the home and the school works for the child's optimum enrichment. Research has demonstrated that " . . . many of the home environment processes can be altered by parents if they choose to do so and that the effects . . . are very great" (Brofenbrenner, 1974, cited in Bloom, 1981, p. 2). Most children in preschool programs do not receive sufficient daily individual reading/nurturing time and individual creative play time needed to lay a strong foundation for literacy. Parents have the responsibility and the opportunity to work with the schools to make the difference. Former superintendent of Chicago schools, Ruth Love, remarked, ". . . if we would get our parents to read to their preschool children fifteen minutes a day, we could revolutionize the schools" (Trelease, 1982, cited in Neuman, 1986, p. 342). In conclusion, this writer

views cultural literacy, creativity, and play as intricately woven elements which outfit a person for an enriching, productive life. Ensuring that these elements are properly nurtured in children at an early age should be a clear mandate for parents and educators. In the words of Bruno Bettelheim, distinguished child psychologist and proponent of fantasy, " . . . it is a truth as valid today as it was once upon a time" (Bettelheim, 1976, p. 310).

# CHAPTER III

## ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

### Goals and Expectations

The general goals of the practicum were to solve the identified problem concerned with laying a solid literacy foundation for children attending a full-time child-care center. The first goal centered around increasing individualized reading/nurturing time of children in the program. The second goal aimed for an increased awareness on the part of the preschool director and parents as to the value of creative play. As a third goal, the writer hoped that at the end of the practicum process all persons involved in it would demonstrate positive attitudes revealing their eagerness to incorporate creativity, play, and reading into the lives of the children on a continuing basis. Each child could look forward to a lifetime of reading pleasure moving up the "ladder of literacy" prepared to be a contributing citizen of society as a critical thinker and a creative problem solver.

### Behavior Expected

The writer expected the following behaviors to occur as a result of the practicum implementation. To begin with, children who participated in the program would receive increased individualized reading/nurturing time both at the

child-care facility and in the home. Secondly, they would simultaneously cultivate a knowledge of children's literature and develop positive attitudes toward the habit of reading. Thirdly, the preschool director and parents would translate their increased awareness of the value of creative play into an assortment of activities that stimulate and enrich the imaginative capacities of children in their care. Fourthly, at the end of the 3-month program, newly-formed attitudes and activities would be intact, setting a strong precedent for the creation of future projects and gains in the realm of literacy/creativity enhancement along with increased cooperation toward that goal between child-care facility and home.

## Mechanism for Recording Unexpected Events

The writer maintained a record of all significant activities and conversations related to the 12-week practicum implementation. A great portion of the project involved observations of behavior and attitude on the part of preschool personnel, parents, and children. Brief chats or lengthy conferences were held with parents as necessary as the project unfolded. They were logged for documentation. At the end of each week, the writer noted any major behavior patterns or unexpected occurrences.

## Measurement of Objectives

The writer employed both quantitative and qualitative measures in assessing the practicum's specific objectives which were written as follows:

OBJECTIVE 1. Over a period of 12 weeks, the writer will expect to enroll and maintain 50% of the 3 and 4-year-old youngsters in the practicum process as measured by a simple tabulation of numbers. (There continue to be 24 children enrolled in the child-care facility's 3 and 4-year-old group.)

OBJECTIVE 2. Over a period of 12 weeks, children who participate in the practicum process will receive an increase of individualized reading/nurturing time in the home as measured by writer-designed pre-practicum and post-practicum surveys of children's favorite books, by assessment of the number of books checked out from the newly established minilibrary at the day-care center, and by statements from parents attesting to their involvement with practicum procedures.

OBJECTIVE 3. Over a period of 12 weeks, children who participate in the practicum process will demonstrate increased awareness of children's literary characters as measured by pre and post-practicum oral/pictorial questionnaires. Further, they will exhibit positive

attitudes and enthusiasm toward the habit of reading as measured by assessments of the preschool director, other preschool caregivers, parents, and the writer. Documentation for assessments will be recorded in the writer's daily log of behavioral observations. Any conversation indicative of an attitude change related to the practicum process will be noted . . . e.g. conversations between writer and parents, parents and children, writer and children, or preschool director and writer.

OBJECTIVE 4. Over a period of 12 weeks, the writer, preschool personnel, and parents will provide increased creative play opportunities on a weekly basis as measured by observations of the writer and documented by her log of noteworthy activities and conversations with preschool personnel and parents.

## Method of Analyzing Results

At the end of the 12-week practicum implementation, the writer conducted a thorough analysis of the mechanisms of the practicum process in regard to form and content and supported her findings with both quantitative and qualitative data. Firestone (1987) asserts that the two types of analyses can be complementary, and often one type will serve as an excellent corroboration for the other. For the writer's first measurable objective, she expected to enroll and maintain 50% of the 3 and 4-year-old population.

It is appropriate to comment here about the sample size. That age group totaled 24 in number. The writer opened up the program to all of the children enrolled but knew that it was unrealistic to expect 100% participation. Allowing for attrition, she therefore set 50% as an acceptable goal. In analyzing the second measurable objective, the writer studied comparisons in response to pre-practicum and post-practicum surveys as part of a one-group pretest-posttest design. For the third and fourth measurable objectives, the writer relied on qualitative data. Firestone (1987) refers to ". . . rich depiction . . ." as the ". . . hallmark of most qualitative research . . ." (p. 19). In this type of analysis, descriptions and quotations are frequently used to offer insightful perspectives on the participants in addition to detailed reporting of the ". . . multiple realities . . ." (p. 16) that make up the practicum process.

# CHAPTER IV

## SOLUTION STRATEGY

### Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

A solid theoretical framework exists as to the value of creativity and play as dynamic forces in the development of literacy. Literacy on its lowest level of meaning implies the ability to read and write; on its highest level it connotes the attainment of knowledge and culture. The writer's ultimate goal for the preschool children in the practicum project is the attainment of literacy in its highest form. A search for possible solutions to the problem outlined must share that concept as a common goal. The related literature in this study emphasizes the significance of play, creativity, and reading/nurturing time for children. Overall its purpose is not to present specific solutions although many of the authors refer to some valuable practices that can be incorporated into individual programs. As a review, Christie & Johnson (1983) urge that art, music, and movement be a major part of early childhood curricula, and Severeide (1984) ties in play with science and problem solving. Wolfgang & Sanders (1981), Egan (1985), and Dehouske (1982) emphasize the importance of fantasizing and representational play; Gray & Chanoff (1984) warn against too much structure in the traditional school and stress creativity and listening skills. Those

researchers who point to parental influences and reading in the home as powerful elements are Ninio & Bruner (1978), Neuman & Prowda (1982), and Singer & Singer (1985). The latter cite the use of children's literature as a catalyst for parent storytelling and sociodramatic play. Many educators, social scientists, and psychologists value role playing as a vital tool in child development. Trelease (1982) is a writer who applauds role playing and especially advocates parents' reading aloud to their children. Reading books instead of viewing television programs rates high with Moody (1980) and Farrell (1981). That children learn how to learn is a major concern of Bloom (1981). He believes as do Adcock & Segal (1983) that cooperation among children and the nurturing of social and emotional development play a critical role in raising children who can adjust well to society. In Play Together Grow Together, Adcock & Segal describe in detail a myriad of creative activities for children at the preschool level. In an effort to stimulate the reading habits of young children and their parents, Brubaker & Keiser (1982) initiated a creative pilot project through the University of Cincinnati. As they were working with educationally disadvantaged veterans enrolled in a part-time evening program at the university through VUB (Veterans Upward Bound), they set improvement in reading as one of their major goals for adult students. Accordingly, they began a program entitled "Read to Your

Child" wherein the young fathers agreed to read one book per week to the children. The authors of the project prepared a bibliography of children's books for their students along with record keeping sheets for documentation of time spent and books read. None of the fathers had ever read to the children prior to the outset of the project. They started with one book, but after the first week, they enjoyed it so much that they increased their reading to an average of five books per week. The children's ages ranged from one year to thirteen years. The older children began to request that their fathers bring home similar but higher level books for them. One teenager took over the reading when his father stopped. Specific aims of the program included practicing oral reading skills and using the father as a teacher, reader, and role model so that the children would recognize the importance of reading not only for themselves but for their fathers as well. Another goal was to stimulate conversation within the family. Some of their favorite books were the Curious George stories, Harry the Dirty Dog, and Frog and Toad. One imaginative part of the program was the use of picture books which contained no words at all. This exercise sparked creative storytelling offerring the children an adventure into fantasy. Greaney (1986) also refers to picture books as an important focal point on the road to literacy.

Two more educators who believe that learning begins with play, Isenberg & Jacobs (1982), have published a descriptive guide for parents showing how to encourage children to play in a way that is truly satisfying to them. Make believe is again one of the types of play they have included in their repertoire. Moreover, they indicate the importance of experiencing a balance of active play and quiet play as well as a balance of group play and solitary play. High on their list of priorities is the need for adults to engage in meaningful daily conversations with their children. "Children need the stimulation of adult language and ideas" (p. 19). They suggest mealtime and bedtime as effective times for good communication. This writer values the research and advice proposed in all of the studies she has outlined.

## Description and Justification for Solution Selected

In her own solution strategy, the writer incorporated the philosophies of the researchers she has previously cited. This practicum's overall format is in keeping with the urgent message of educator Ruth Love; it bears repeating. Her cogent words which are rooted in her experience and illustrate her vision served as the cornerstone of the practicum, ". . . if we would get our parents to read to their preschool children fifteen minutes

a day, we could revolutionize the schools" (Trelease, 1982, cited in Neuman, 1986, p. 342). The writer believes that the establishment of a minilibrary of children's literature in the day-care facility coupled with a cooperating parent project designed to encourage daily reading and creativity enhancement through literature-related imaginative activities in the home worked most effectively to solve the problem identified in the practicum.

By setting up a lending library in the preschool facility, the writer first and foremost wished to promote reading in the home through frequent checking out of books by children and parents. As part of the practicum, the writer planned to launch a soft sell campaign for parents who would agree to read to their children for 10 - 15 minutes each day for the entire 12-week period. Realizing that many parents might find it difficult to honor that commitment, the writer did not include that aspect as part of her formal objectives; nevertheless, the challenge was presented to all of the parents from the outset if they wished to accept it. Reporting sheets for recording their daily/weekly literary activities were made available to them. In addition to the opportunity afforded by the on-site library, other phases of the practicum included the initiating of story times by the writer and day-care

personnel and the fostering of a climate for creative play at the preschool center and in the home.

## Report of Action Taken

The following is an account of the major steps taken to implement the practicum. First, the writer selected the day-care center as one that would be appropriate for the practicum. She met and consulted with the director of the facility and found her to be fully receptive to the practicum goals. Next, the writer arranged to borrow the library of children's literature which she had earned through a grant for the dropout prevention programs when she was working at an inner city school. Then, she received permission from the director of the day-care facility to set up the library on shelving located in a corner of the entryway vestibule, the most strategic location for ensuring the success of the project. Before the writer had selected a spot, she had observed the daily dynamics of the day-care operation, noting the children's schedules within the three major age groups in attendance and witnessed the afternoon arrival times of parents. Of uppermost importance was the desire to offer parents easy access to the books as they returned each day to call for their children and to make the book checkout procedure simple and fast. The children also needed to be able to see and reach the books so that they

themselves could participate in and enjoy the book selection process at an early age.

A principal component of the project was to elicit the enthusiasm and cooperation of parents. The writer wished to achieve an effective working relationship with them, maintaining a low profile so as not to intrude either on the authority of the child-care personnel or on the day-to-day (often hectic) happenings at the preschool facility. Initially, the writer had thought that she would hold a series of large group informational meetings for parents: before the project began, during its implementation, and at its conclusion. After the writer made her observations of parental routines, however, she realized that attempting to conduct such meetings would have been impractical. Meetings could not be arranged to accommodate varying schedules of parents who returned for their children at irregular intervals between the hours of 3:30 and 5:30 in the afternooon. In general, the working parents were pressed for time and had errands to perform immediately after leaving the child-care center before heading home. The writer noticed that most of the parents remained at the child-care center for less than five minutes as they greeted their children, gathered up their belongings, and ushered them to their car. For her initial parental contact, she decided to meet with each parent/guardian individually as

they entered the facility. In this manner, the writer was able to introduce herself as well as the program. At the same time, she also distributed to each one of them an informational letter about the upcoming project. The writer had designated the title of the project as

PLAY: PARENTS AS LITERACY ADVOCATES FOR YOUNGSTERS

It was important for parents to know the significance of the acronym. The writer explained to them how the activity of children's play has been connected to cultural literacy and to current research on play which has highlighted its value. They needed to know how to oversee their children's playfulness in order to make creative play a precious part of their young lives. They needed to know that the practicum's major conduit for developing the skills of play would be children's literature and literature-related activities. They needed to know that as parents they would be the most prominent and effective advocates for their children's literacy. When the writer approached parents with the program plan, she found them pleasantly responsive and willing to linger at the preschool somewhat longer than usual. Since that method proved to be a successful means of disseminating practicum news, the writer followed it whenever she wished to communicate general information to parents. Careful planning before initiating parent contact proved to be highly beneficial to the

practicum; as a consequence, the writer received that cooperation necessary for effective implementation throughout the duration of the project.

Attached to the explanatory letter was a SURVEY OF FAVORITES. The writer was interested in learning about the families with whom she would be working. Primarily, she wanted to learn about the reading habits of the parents: 1) in relation to themselves and 2) in relation to their children. From that standpoint, two key questions in the survey were those that pertained to parents' and children's favorite books and authors. The writer did not wish to ask parents outright how much time they spent in reading to their children each day for fear of putting any of them in a defensive mode or making them feel inadequate if they were in fact engaging in no reading at all. Questions related to books and reading were located in the middle of the survey to be named as some of their many "favorite things" on the list. From the responses given, the writer was able to learn about the type of reading done in the home.

Before the writer began the practicum, she made a decision to work primarily with the 3 and 4-year olds who were grouped together as a class. She opted for that age group because of their higher maturity level and because she had prior experience working with children of that age in the inner-city Title XX program. Accordingly then, the

writer's formal objectives were designed for that segment of the preschool population. She had hoped from the practicum's inception, nevertheless, that she would find a way to impact on the 2-year-olds while the practicum was in process.

Once the writer had laid the groundwork for the practicum, she then had to focus on her initial approach with the children and their child-care providers. As a stranger coming into their midst, she needed to be accepted without reservation in order for the implementation to proceed smoothly. The director had suggested that the writer plan her daily visits for the same time each day. She left it open to the writer to select her own slot. There were two strong reasons for choosing the afternoon time: 1) since, on the whole, the children were engaged in less structured activity in the afternoon than they were in the morning, the writer's story presentations could fill a gap; 2) the writer wished to be present at the center when the parents arrived so that she could maximize her contacts with them.

The writer felt she needed to provide some simple pageantry to win over the children on the first day. Book bags were the ceremonial tool. Laden down with small brightly colored bags to which she had affixed vibrant animal stickers, the writer entered the children's arena for

her first encounter. The day-care worker told the children to gather around and be quiet for a story, but neither she, nor the writer, nor the children knew exactly what would transpire. Immediately after the writer offerred the first book bag to one of the youngsters, the rest of them clamored for a bag, and the practicum was underway. (Note: During the course of the practicum the writer on occasion distributed bookmarks and stickers to the children. As a rule, she chose to keep external rewards to a minimum.) She then began reading a Curious George story and talking about the character to the children. They looked wide eyed at the pictures. Some wanted to sit on her lap; some asked questions; some wanted to share ideas with the storyteller. The day-care worker seemed to think that in deference to the writer the children should remain silent throughout the storytelling. The writer indicated by her actions that the dialogue initiated by the children was acceptable to her. From the outset, the writer knew that the practicum could make a difference. After the story, the writer showed the children how they could fit two or three books in their new tote bags. Several walked around the room carrying the bags; others mimicked their action. Later, the writer printed the children's names on the bags and hung them on hooks in the vestibule above the minilibrary. When the parents arrived and books were checked out, the children

proudly toted off their bags. During the first week of the practicum, more than 100 books were checked out. (Chapter V offers details as to totals for the 3-month implementation period.)

Each day when the writer visited the day-care center, she picked up a pile of books from the library area and brought them over to sit at a low round table in the front room which was always full of activity in the late afternoon. Most of the day that room was reserved for the 2-year olds, but after 3:30 p.m., the 3 and 4-year olds were allowed to play in there and mix in with the younger children. When the children observed that the story sessions were about to begin, they usually ran over to the table and selected books to be read to them. They took turns listening and sitting on the writer's lap. She read to an entire group or to individuals depending on the situation at any given day. She never interrupted any of their ongoing activities when she entered the room, and she always waited for them to come over to her. She would begin with one child or twenty. There was always a minimum of twelve participants. On many days there were more. If too many rushed over at one time making it difficult to provide sufficient attention for each child, it was invariably resolved in a satisfactory manner. The writer and children worked it out in different ways. Some of the children sat

on the floor and listened; some sat nearby and "read" their own books; some went off to play and returned later when more individualized attention was available.

As stated earlier in the section on documentation of the problem, the writer had asked the director of the preschool to identify children who she believed needed more attention than others. It was obvious why the four designated children had been selected. Two were aggressive, constantly exhibiting attention-seeking behavior; two were reticent, clearly manifesting problems with self expression. As often as possible, the writer found time to work with those children after she had worked with larger groups. She used the same techniques with them as she did with the others; she merely attempted to give them more time. Both types of children welcomed the attention. The aggressive ones seemed disbelieving that someone was actually taking time to listen to them; the withdrawn children appeared to be less trusting at first of a stranger. It is the writer's opinion that the majority of children at the preschool need to spend more time with adults on an individual basis. They relish in extra attention and appreciate being able to exchange unhurried, opened-ended dialogue with adult listeners. Although preschool workers cleary demonstrate a genuine interest in the children, demands on their time

simply do not permit extended time for lengthy conversations with each child.

Enhancing the children's natural creativity was an important part of the practicum. During the 12-week period, the writer chose to foster that creativity predominantly through the channel of the children's verbal expression. Like Greaney, the writer values the picture book in the process of language development. If the writer was working with a group of children, she would read each page and then hold up the pictures and/or pass the pictures around for all the children to see. Frequently, she would ask the children to put their finger on a character or object in the picture and name it after she did. They enjoyed doing that, and through that method became very involved in the story. After a while, they began to talk about the characters or something they were reminded about by the story's pictures. In group work, they heard the ideas of others and added ideas of their own. If a child was being read to alone, that child had an unlimited amount of time to express his/her thoughts. It worked to a child's advantage if the parent occasionally arrived at the center late. The writer was able to work with that child longer than anyone else. Most of the 3 and 4-year-olds love to talk, and when given the opportunity, they would tell some lively stories. Often their narratives would describe their family members or an

incident that had occurred at home. The writer looked forward to each session with the children, enjoying those experiences as much as they did. The need for listeners is so great in the development of language and the fostering of creativity that the writer began to fantasize about an ideal child-care center where each child would have his/her own personal "LISTENER" who would perform a role much like that of a straight man to a comedian, timing appropriate comments to draw out that unique creativeness within.

Another facet of the creativity segment of the practicum requested that the 3 and 4-year olds draw their own pictures about the stories that were read to them. The writer sat with them as they made their illustrations. The children worked intently; some of the children talked as they imaginatively plied their craft; some said not a word. All of them gave detailed accounts about their drawings when they had finished. When the writer had distributed the book bags to the children, she had included a drawing tablet in each bag. At that time she had informed parents about the value of children's drawings and suggested that after their storytime at home, parents could direct the children to draw something related to the story. It might be something closely related to the story such as a specific story character, or it might be a "way out" concept such as a picture of the child flying when the subject matter of the

story had actually been about an airplane or a bird. To counter any parent comments similar to, "Johnny only makes a bunch of scribbles," the writer assured them that, "Scribbles are the greatest!" She advised them of Rhoda Kellogg's extensive study (Goodnow, 1977) of children's drawings throughout the cultures of the world in which she analyzed and classified 20 types of scribbles. Eventually, as children mature, their scribbles become part of other patterns. Kellogg made an analogy comparing an older child who practices beginning sounds or letters of the alphabet to the 3-year-old who practices his/her repertoire of artistic forms. Encouraging that manner of expression, the practicum writer told parents that she would be delighted to see any of their drawings, and she shared with them a remarkable observation from child psychologist Jacqueline Goodnow who described children's artwork and its fulfillment of the creative process as the "visible thinking" (Goodnow, 1977, p. 145) of the young.

Making parents and preschool personnel aware of the value of creative play was a significant segment of the practicum. Researchers describe play in a number of ways as outlined in the literature review. For the 3-month period, the writer chose to concentrate on the following aspects of play as synthesized from the review of the literature:

1. Play as meaningful conversations between adults and

children (Isenberg & Jacobs, 1982).

2. Play as the development of creativity from listening skills (Gray & Chanoff, 1984).
3. Play as creative storytelling stemming from the use of picture books (Greaney, 1986).
4. Play as reading in the home (Ninio & Bruer, 1978; Neuman & Prowda, 1982).
5. Play and parent storytelling using children's literature as a catalyst (Singer & Singer, 1985).
6. Play as reading aloud and role playing (Trelease, 1982).
7. Play as fantasizing (Wolfgang & Sanders, 1981; Egan, 1985; Dehouske, 1982).
8. Play as make believe (Isenberg & Jacobs, 1982).
9. Solitary play (Isenberg & Jacobs, 1982).
10. Cooperative play (Adcock & Segal, 1983).

The writer decided to share ideas and research on play via an informational newsletter. That method gave both groups time to digest the material and identify aspects of special interest to them and with which they felt most comfortable. The writer perceived her role as a resource person and guide whose strategies could be observed by anyone at any time as she worked with the children. If preschool personnel or parents wished to model some of their own activities with the children after any of those which

the writer had demonstrated during the 3-month period, that option existed for them. The writer was at ease with this method and believed it was successful in promoting practicum goals. Individual conversations with parents verified the fact that practicum techniques were being applied in the home.

The underlying philosophy of the preschool director coincided with several of the authors' views on play. Similarly, the child-care workers supported the ideas of the director. The difference between the desired ideal and reality as to the attainment of any program's goals often involves financial considerations and time constraints. The operating expenses of most day-care centers, including the one where the practicum was implemented, do not lend themselves to providing children with individualized attention or instruction, no matter how caring the personnel may be. Caregivers have a difficult job comprised of long hours and the urgency of meeting needs of active youngsters. They are not certified teachers, nor are they steeped in teacher training, but they do unquestionably perform roles of teachers. One of the greatest gifts they can offer the children is their patience. From the outset the writer was delighted with the cooperation she received from the day-care personnel. During the first week of the practicum, the teachers of the 3 and 4-year olds began using the books from the minilibrary for story time, both in the morning and in the afternoon. Without any prompting from the writer, the

teacher of the 2-year-old group followed suit. On several occasions the writer entered the preschool in the afternoon to find a majority of 2-year-olds sitting on the floor intently perusing their individual picture books. Teacher-caregivers continued to encourage independent reading when they observed its quieting effect on the children. As the weeks passed by, 2-year-olds joined in the story sessions daily when they noticed that they were taking place. The writer was pleased with the significant impact the practicum had made upon the younger age group.

## Summary of Implementation Steps

The following is a summary of major steps taken to implement the practicum:

1. Selected appropriate child-care facility.
2. Met and consulted with director.
3. Borrowed a library of children's literature to use at the site.
4. Observed daily dynamics of preschool operation prior to implementation.
5. Learned habits and routine of preschool personnel, parents, and children.
6. Offered parents and children easy access to books via a mini-lending library system.
7. Established rapport with parents.
8. Disseminated introductory program information to parents on an individual basis (Appendix A).

9. Emphasized the program's title -- PLAY: PARENTS AS LITERACY ADVOCATES FOR YOUNGSTERS.
10. Initiated a SURVEY OF FAVORITES to elicit information as to parental reading habits and the children's favorite books (Appendix B).
11. Planned, wrote, and implemented practicum objectives around the 3 and 4-year old age group.
12. Distributed book bags to youngsters.
13. Gave colorful PLAY bookmarks and animal stickers to the children on the first day as they checked out their books.
14. Provided Minilibrary Signup Sheets for simplified checkout procedures (Appendix C).
15. Designed record keeping sheets for parents to keep track of their in-home reading time to the children (Appendix D).
16. Informed parents and preschool personnel about research on play and its value for cultural literacy (Appendix E).
17. Visited preschool for a minimum of three days per week.
18. Supplied a first-week update on the PLAY program (Appendix F).
19. Read stories, talked with, and listened to the children individually or in groups.

20. Enhanced children's natural creativity through:
    a. Encouraging children's verbal expression of ideas.
    b. Actively listening to children.
    c. Offering opportunities for children to create story-related illustrations.
21. Advocated the need for creative play at school and in the home through:
    a. Conversations with parents.
    b. Informational newsletter.
    b. Modelling creative activities at the day-care facility.
22. Included 2-year-old group as an unofficial yet significant secondary phase of the practicum process.
23. Wrote newsletter for a midpoint PLAY program update (Appendix G).
24. Conducted a second and final survey relating to favorite books and authors (Appendix H).
25 Observed the "multiple realities" of the practicum process.
26. Recorded appropriate data for project documentation.
27. Expressed via a newsletter appreciation of parent participation (Appendix I).

# CHAPTER V

## RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Results

Objective 1, that of enrolling and maintaining 50% of the 3 and 4-year-old youngsters in the practicum process -- as measured by a simple tabulation of numbers -- was achieved as planned. Throughout the practicum implementation 24 children continued to be registered at the day-care facility in the 3 and 4-year-old age group. In accordance with the practicum's design, all of those children participated in the reading program to some extent during the 3-month period either by checking out books or by attending story-reading sessions given by the preschool teachers or the writer of the practicum. In terms of "hard-core enrollees", those who attended most story sessions, checked out books regularly, and whose parents demonstrated strong interest and support, the writer identified 14 children, 2 more than the 12 needed to realize the 50% goal.

Objective 2 focused on increasing individualized reading/nurturing time in the home. The attainment of that objective was measured in three ways. The first method employed pre and post-practicum surveys related to parent/child reading habits using the SURVEY OF FAVORITES as a data gathering tool. As a second measure, the writer referred to the Minilibrary Signup Sheets designed for

parents to record names of books as they checked them out from the day-care facility. Thirdly, the writer recorded statements from parents attesting to their in-home involvement with practicum procedures.

The pre-practicum SURVEY OF FAVORITES was distributed to all of the parents of the 3 and 4-year-old age group in person on an individual basis. Of the 24 students four were siblings; therefore, the total number of parents of children in that age group was 20. Ten parents returned the survey. The director of the facility considered that a good response. She informed the writer that the parents were not inclined to return forms of any kind. On the survey, parents indicated the following books as favorite selections: Muppet Baby Book, Jack in the Beanstalk, Pinocchio, Cinderella, Donald Duck, Peter Pan, Lady and the Tramp, The Cat in the Hat, ABC Book, The Tooth Book, and Never Talk to Strangers. (The writer noted that the first eight books listed could also have been seen by the children as movies or as television productions.) Under favorite books, the parent who listed The Cat in the Hat also wrote in Dr. Seuss books as a general category without recalling specific book titles. Under favorite authors, that same parent and one other listed Dr. Seuss. No other parents named a favorite author. They left the category blank.

For the practicum's minilibrary the writer had carefully selected a total of 16 authors and a total of 140

books. Pre-practicum, as indicated above, parents were familiar with only 1 author out of the 16 and only 1 book out of the 140 selected. Post-practicum, parents named Berenstain, Eastman, Freeman, Hoban, Minarik, Rey, and Sendak in addition to Seuss as the children's favorite authors, i.e. 8 authors out of the 16. Similarly, post-practicum, when naming books to the favorite book category, the same 10 parents named a minimum of 5 books each, all from the minilibrary collection: six parents named 5 books; one parent named 6 books, one parent named 7 books, one parent named 8 books, and one parent named 10 books. When asked to respond to the second survey, parents had been exposed to a 3-month concerted reading effort on behalf of their children. They had become familiar with the books and may have had the books in their home when they made their survey replies. It was not a question of memorizing names of authors' or books. One might argue that the writer was biased and "leading the witnesses," so to speak, in order that parents would make appropriate responses on the survey. To that, the writer would reply, "Precisely, the point of the practicum!" The writer believes that her project was one of exceptional merit, and if it helped to make parents and children in the program aware of and able to enjoy fine selections of children's literary classics, then she considers the practicum an unqualified success. Her intent was to lead parents to books and be their guide as to creative, literary experiences for their children. Being

able to name authors and books that their youngsters prefer or could benefit from is a significant step in preparing them for a high degree of literacy.

The Minilibrary Signup Sheets helped keep a fairly accurate record of the books that went home. Parents signed them most of the time; occasionally they would forget, and there were times when children carried books out of the building unnoticed with their other belongings. In any case, the writer was pleased that the books went home and felt that the relaxed, honor checkout system she had arranged was the best method to follow. During the first week of the practicum, the largest volume of books went home; as noted earlier more than 100 books were checked out. Children were using their new book bags and each child took home several books. According to official signup records, the grand total for July book checkout was 133 books. Thereafter, the volume tapered off but remained consistent for the duration of the project. August book checkout was 67, September book checkout was 86, and October book checkout was 76. When looking at the total scheme of the practicum, one must keep in mind that the minilibrary collection housed only 140 books; nevertheless, that number was 140 more books to which the children had access than prior to the program's implementation. What clearly emerges as the focal point of the project is the true enjoyment children received from a privilege which had been previously nonexistent in the day-care facility's regular routine.

Statements from parents was a third method of measurement for the second objective. All of the feedback from parents was positive and indicated they believed the reading program was emotionally rewarding and intellectually beneficial to their children. Parents appreciated the fact that the practicum writer is a state-certified teacher and seemed to favor the idea of a public school teacher being affiliated with the day-care center. They thought it added quality to the program, and they liked the idea of their childen receiving extra attention. Parent conversations with the writer revealed they were pleased that their children exhibited a lively interest in the books, and they frequently commented about their 3 and 4-year-olds "reading" the books in the car on the way to and from the day-care center and how the children would talk aloud at home with books on their laps as if they were actually reading. Since the children spent a considerable amount of time riding in the car with their parent/s, the writer's definition of "home" included time spent in the car as well. She remembered her own childrearing years where much of her children's learning took place in the family car. Most of the parents told the writer they tried to read a bedtime story each night. (Note: Only a few parents committed themselves to filling out the special forms designed by the writer to record the number of minutes in daily/weekly reading to their children. At the outset of the practicum, this had been important to the writer; she thought it would

be a simple procedure for parents to use the forms provided, and she wanted the sheets for program documentation. After a brief period of observing the parents' busy lifestyles while also noting their general acceptance of and compliance with overall program goals, she decided that placing too much emphasis on the forms themselves would have been a mistake and might have added in a negative factor to a program that was from its incipiency producing positive parental performance. The writer will comment in a separate section of Chapter V on those parents who found time to complete the daily/weekly record-keeping forms.)

Objective 3, concerned with measuring children's awareness of literary characters, was done by administering pre and post-practicum oral/pictorial questionnaires. Pre-practicum, the writer verified the students' familiarity with their favorite storybook characters as listed in the Survey of Favorites (Objective 2), namely, the Muppets, Jack in the Beanstalk, Pinnochio, Cinderella, Donald Duck, Lady and the Tramp, and the Cat in the Hat. Accordingly, the children whose parents had listed those specific characters as favorites were in fact able to identify them from picture books. Later, using the minilibrary collection, the writer then asked the children to identify literary characters by name as she showed them pictures from the new books. Some of the children (4-year-olds) could identify Curious George by name, but most of the children simply referred to him as a monkey. Similarly, the children used generic animal names

for the other characters. None of the children could give specific personalized names for any of the minilibrary characters; it was obvious that they were unfamiliar with both the characters and the stories. Post-practicum, all of the ten children who participated in the practicum program on a regular basis were able to name the following characters from the minilibrary collection: Arthur (from the Marc Brown series), Dandelion (a Don Freeman creation), Hippo (featured in two books by Roger Hargreaves), Danny (from Danny and the Dinosaur by Syd Hoff), Little Bear (from the series by Else H. Minarik), Curious George (from Margret Rey's books), Fox in Sox (children gave whole title of that Dr. Seuss book). Further identification could be provided by three 4-year-olds who were able to name Corduroy (another Don Freeman character), Horton (from two adventures about him by Dr. Seuss) and Commander Toad (from Jane H. Yolen's series of four books).

Another measurement of Objective 3 was the observation of the children's positive attitudes and enthusiasm toward the habit of reading. From the first day of the practicum, the children demonstrated a strong interest in the books that were newly made available to them. The day-care facility's more limited offerring of books was not duplicated in the minilibrary collection. The writer had selected books because of their literary merit and because of their imaginative artwork. Pre-schoolers delighted in the colorful, fanciful illustrations whether they simply

held a book alone and browsed through it or whether someone read a book to them. On any given day during the practicum implementation, a lay person or an educator could enter the day-care center and observe the children's enthusiasm for reading-related activities. All persons involved in the practicum implementation could attest to that fact. One example of the preschool director's involvement could be seen when the writer walked into the center one afternoon and saw 12 youngsters sitting in a circle, each quietly perusing a book while the day-care director vacuumed a corner of the room. Normally during that time of day the children played together with big toys in the largest room. It was a time when they were generally noisy because they were permitted more freedom; by design the overall activity was less structured than others occurring earlier in their daily routine. It happened that the director had suddenly found herself short of help late in the day because of illness on the part of an employee. A mess in one area of the room needed to be picked up immediately before it was tracked throughout the entire room. She gave the childen minilibrary books, sat them on the other side of the room, and told them she would read them a story as soon as she finished the cleaning. Having a very special relationship with the director, they eagerly awaited her attention. Since the minilibrary had become available to the preschool, the director and the caregiver of the 3 and 4-year-old children had been taking turns for morning storytime. The

director had welcomed the program and showed by her involvement with it that she was committed to making it an integral part of the day-care's activities. Before she took on the position of director of the facility with its multi-level roles of administrator, cook, and maintenance person, she had worked more closely with the children as a teacher. The practicum implementation again afforded her many enjoyable moments with the children. Her enthusiasm for the program had been noticeably transmitted to the children. In this instance the writer witnessed a room of eager, patient "readers" at a time of day when it might have been normal for tired children's tempers to flare. Acting as a quieting agent, the books absorbed the children's curiosity and attention as they waited for the preschool director to finish her work and take them on a literary adventure. Being well aware of the salutary effect of the reading program, she used it to work to her own advantage and that of the children.

Other preschool caregivers took their cue from the director. She had given her support to the program from the first day and so did they. All of them incorporated mimilibrary storytime into their repertoire and proudly told the writer how their reading to the children had been so well received.

Positive attitudes and enthusiasm toward reading on the part of the children were noted by parents and the writer. When parents arrived in the afternoon, the writer was

working with the children. The writer always had several books lying on the table near where she sat and read to the youngsters. Often each child would select a book for the reading session taking turns sitting on the writer's lap. (Sometimes she managed three or four children on her lap at once; she gave as much individual attention as possible.) The children usually wanted to take the selected book home. Sometimes their parents would not permit them to check out a book because they still had a book or two from the minilibrary at home, and they thought they should return them first before taking out any more. It should be noted also that there were a few parents who did not wish to check out books in general and gave as a reason that they had other books at home. In either case, the children generally balked and squawked all the way to the front door, adamant about wanting the book. Some parents broke down under pressure and permitted them to take the book; others remained resolute, if not rueful, in their decision and continued to endure their children's disappointed wails all the way to their car and beyond. In such instances, the writer chuckled inwardly, delighted to witness the persistent, unabashed enthusiasm of the literary-minded cherubs.

Some of the most exhilarating and rewarding moments for the writer began to occur about midway through the practicum's implementation when children from both age groups began to run over to her each day when she arrived at

the school. They scrambled for the books and vied to be first to choose a story and sit on her lap. After the official 12-week practicum implementation, the writer continued to visit the day-care facility for two months; thereafter she scheduled visits less frequently as time permitted. One day after a week's absence, the writer visited the preschool with her 17-year-old son who helped her deliver a heavy box of books. When the writer entered the room, her son was astounded to see the children "drop everything", rush across the room, and mob her with cries of "Books! Books!" and "Story! Story!" The writer first needed to meet with the director in her office adjacent to the playroom, but the children followed along behind still chanting "Books!" and "Story!" There could be no doubt that the minilibrary program had achieved its goal of fostering enthusiasm and excitment for children's literature and related storytime activities.

OBJECTIVE 4, that of providing increased creative play opportunities on a weekly basis was measured by observations of the writer and documented by her log of noteworthy activities and conversations with preschool personnel and parents. The writer believes that she made an inroad in this area. Using 10 guidelines for PLAY which she developed from her review of the literature, the writer described the value of each type of PLAY with parents, provided them with explanatory information on the topic, and modelled creative play activities with the children for preschool personnel

and parents to observe. That objective was more complex than the others and, in order for it to be assessed more thoroughly, the writer would like to see it followed up over an extended period of time. Ideally, short-term and long-term measurement of the objective could have been assigned in order to determine how much of a stronghold one had made by way of an ongoing impact. However, as stated clearly in the objective, during the 12-week implementation period, opportunities for increased creative play were provided.

As part of a larger, abstract picture, the concept of PLAY needed to be explained, understood, demonstrated, discussed, initiated, practiced, repeated, assimilated, expanded, integrated, and then continued to be put into effect indefinitely in the home and in the child-care center.

In assessing the 10 PLAY objectives in the order given, the writer noted the following behaviors:

1. The writer emphasized to all adults involved in the practicum process the importance of engaging in meaningful conversations with the children. The writer herself would have enjoyed spending 15 - 30 minutes with each child on a regular basis but that was impossible; nevertheless, given the limited time she had to work with the children at each session, she noted how much the children wanted to express themselves at length and how they appreciated having someone to sit still and listen to them. Preschool caregivers did not have time to master that objective on an

individual basis, but the writer believes that by providing group storytime for the children, talking to them about stories, and listening to them verbalize their story-related ideas, albeit in a group, preschool personnel made a valuable contribution toward meeting that objective. Parents would be the key to keeping this objective alive as would they be with all of the objectives outlined because they have the largest block of time to invest.

2. Developing creativity from listening skills is another objective best measured in the long term; however, the writer observed that all of the children who were more fidgety at the outset of the practicum had improved their listening skills during the 12-week practicum period. This was particularly noted with the 2-year-old age group who at the beginning of the practicum would wander over to listen to a story and then walk off to another activity, but as the weeks passed by, were able to focus their listening attention toward hearing a complete story. Tied in with the development of higher levels of concentration where active listening is involved, the honing of the listening skill is a gradual and essential process in laying the groundwork for a climate of creative play; the writer believes that the groundwork was laid during the practicum implementation, and that if the same types of activities are continued, the children will reap the accompanying benefits as they grow and mature in a progression of creative learning experiences.

3. In regard to creative storytelling, the children themselves took over this obective as they began to be exuberant, creative story tellers in their own right. Picture books were the major resource through which that skill was channeled and developed. The 2-year-olds frequently perused books that were purely pictorial (no words at all) and vividly spun tales of their own creation.

4. The fostering of creative play through reading in the home was well documented during the practicum implementation period.

5. In the informational newsletter pertaining to PLAY, the writer informed parents about the value of their own creative storytelling to the children. Several who enjoyed participating in this type of activity had remembered pleasant childhood experiences wherein their parents, grandparents, or other older relatives had repeatedly made special moments and memories for them by intriguing them with self-styled fantasies. These parents expressed a determination to find more time to do this for their own children.

6. As the writer read aloud to the children, she engaged in role playing. Throughout the stories the writer would change her voice for each different character and adjust her expressions accordingly, demonstrating a range of emotions. She always allowed time for the children to do likewise. They indeed proved themselves to be natural actors free from

any self consciousness, stepping into their roles with animation and abandon.

7. Play as fantasizing relates to all of the practicum activities which prepared the children to recognize their limitless imaginative powers.

8. Play as make believe was strengthened as the increased number of literature-related activites implemented throughout the practicum afforded the children more opportunities to pretend.

9. Solitary play was observed by the writer, preschool caregivers, and parents both in the day-care center and in the home. Sharing Smilansky's guidelines for productive play helped clarify some of their questions and add to their understanding. There was no provision in the practicum to document the amount or quality of solitary play as to pre and post-practicum comparisons. The practicum's emphasis, in that regard was to make parents aware of the value of solitary play and inform them how creative experiences through literature could help the children realize a self-actualizing type of solitary play wherein they hold the power to tap, expand, and enjoy their creativity to the fullest extent.

10. Cooperative play can be engaged in far more effectively when children have active imaginations at their disposal to assist them in creating a variety of fanciful situations which keep them entertained, prevent boredom, offset frustration, and ward off verbal altercations or physical

assaults on one another. Parents provided insight into the measurement of that objective as they related how their children seemed to play better with each other after their storytime at home. The literature had offerred them food for thought on which to build clever make-believe activities to occupy their thoughts and their time. All of the literary activities had cooperation as an ultimate goal, from simple localized levels involving youngsters in day care to complex encounters of global proportions affecting adults in society at large.

## Unexpected Events

As part of the practicum, the writer was surprised and pleased to record in the realm of the unexpected a significant segment of the project which she labelled Family Impact. Several parents had two children in attendance at the child-care facility. From the first day of implementation, 2-year-olds who had a sibling enrolled in the 3 and 4-year-old age group were automatically drawn into the project by their desire to share in the book checkout process to be like their older brothers or sisters. As previously indicated, 2-year-olds were not included in the practicum's formal objectives, but the writer sincerely hoped that the PLAY program would demonstrate its positive influence on them as well as on the older childen. Since no child at the center would be denied access to books because of age, any 2-year-old who desired library privileges was

cheerfully granted that honor by the writer. As it happened, the 2-year-old sibling group was immediately hooked on books. They were also the first of the 2-year-olds to join in the afternoon story sessions, choose books for the writer to read them, and exhibit longer attention spans related to their listening skills. Five 2-year-olds were in that family category. Further family impact occurred with three other families who had two children enrolled in the 3 and 4-year-old age group. In summation, eight family groups (a total of 16 children) demonstrated the most involvement with the minilibrary program in each of its aspects. The writer labelled them all hard-core enrollees and the staunchest supporters of the project.

The PLAY program's impact on the rest of the 2-year-olds was also unexpected and highly positive. The child care providers' cooperation with the morning story program was a significant factor ensuring this success. Moreover, the writer conducted the afternoon story sessions for the 3 and 4-year-olds in the same large room where the younger children played. The proximity factor worked to the 2-year-olds' advantage as they gradually joined in full project participation.

A mild two-fold dilemma arose at the end of the official 12-week practicum implementation period. Pleased with the success of her program, the writer did not wish to "take her books and run." Furthermore, the two families who proved to be most ardent in their use of the minilibrary had

requested more books. They had read all of the on-loan grant books several times. First, the writer decided to extend the time period for the grant books; that collection continued to satisfy the majority of children. Secondly, of necessity and desire, she began to visit the local branch of the county library to add a new source of books for the Fanatic Four. Each time, she obtained a box of 25 books. She arranged with the preschool director to have the box of books placed in her office and informed the parents in only those two avid-reading families about its existence on the premises. Since the books had been checked out on the writer's personal library card, she could not risk extending the checkout privilege to the entire preschool population. The mothers of the four children continued to prove themselves reliable as to the books' return. Of those two families, one family faithfully submitted record keeping sheets each week from the beginning of the practicum on through the extension period. (In the other family, the mother continued to read regularly to her children and keep up high morale in spite of her husband's being treated for a malignant brain tumor. From approximately mid point in the implementation, she did not continue to complete the record keeping forms.)

The writer had previously investigated the possibility of writing a grant in the hope of earning funds for the child care center to develop a permanent library of its own. She contacted two local education foundations as to their

criteria for grant disbursements. One of them serves Kindergarten - Grade 12; the other deals only with non-profit agencies. The privately owned preschool did not qualify on either count.

The writer had made a personal commitment to continue her affiliation with the facility for the remainder of the traditional school year. Having initiated the practicum in July and completed implementation of its formal objectives before the end of October, the writer anticipated maintaining an informal association with the center through the following June. The practicum had been well received and had achieved its goals; the writer had developed a pleasant rapport with children and preschool personnel; she would have enjoyed further monitoring of the youngsters' progress. Shortly before Christmas, however, there was a sudden change of management at the preschool and along with it, a change in child-care providers. Financial problems had been one factor attributing to the takeover by the original owner. Not long into the new year, the preschool encountered license-related problems and closed its doors. The writer was not able to continue her intended followup work.

## Conclusions

All of the practicum's formal objectives were implemented, measured, and assessed. Through the PLAY program, the writer had put in motion for the youngsters a series of steps geared to producing more pleasurable, playful experiences within a creative context, maintaining as a constant focus the ultimate goal of cultural literacy with parents as principal advocates toward its fulfillment. The writer is confident that she made a contribution to the children's early intellectual growth and that she communicated an important message to parents about their powerful role in developing positive reading performance patterns in their young.

A review of the literature related to play demonstrates its value for acquiring the ability to think in the abstract. The writer chose children's literature as the primary means of nurturing play and attaining the goal. Influenced by her experience with children and the scholarly work of researchers, she deliberately confined the program to books and abstract, reading-related activities. Post-practicum, she is excited about her new insight into the field of early childhood, and she has developed an intense desire to continue research on play. She is intrigued by remarks of Egan (1985) about a need for research into the art of creativity as it affects school-age children. Egan's assertions highlight his sensitivity to the literacy vacuum

which he perceives throughout the education profession. The writer reaffirms Egan's departure from the common belief that abstract learning must originate with the manipulation of concrete objects. Commenting on what he believes to be a destructive thesis, he appears enraged that, "What cannot be directly tied to some simple content within the child's immediate experience has been increasingly forced out of the early school curriculum" (p. 165).

Teaching language arts full time in a junior high school setting, the writer is distressed by the lack of creativity exhibited by the majority of students at that level. Aside from normal adolescent peer pressure identifications and alliances, there exudes an all pervasive alarming sameness about the students' thought processes. With the exception of a few inquisitive gifted students, the writer sees large numbers of unquestioning, passive students who appear powerless on their own to tap the well of creativity with which they were born. She is reminded of a poem about a young child who was asked by one of his first teachers to draw a flower. When his masterpiece was unacceptable to the teacher because of its unique design, he submitted a second rendition: a "uniform" flower like those drawn by his classmates. His teacher praised him for it. Thereafter he gradually conformed to the instruction of unimaginative teachers. When he eventually encountered a teacher who encouraged him to exercise creativity, he had become intellectually sterile and could draw a flower only

one way. The school system had suffocated his imagination. The writer aligns herself with Egan and other researchers who seek to raise imagination to its position of paramount importance in the hierarchy of thought.

## Recommendations

By way of recommendation, the writer urges the following:

1. Strong parental involvement in children's literary development. Parents need to be aware of their importance as reading role models and as advocates for programs leading to cultural literacy.
2. Early childhood literary experiences rich in creative play. Children at home and children in child care should have equal opportunity to "climb the ladder of literacy."
3. On-site library services for parents of children in full-time child care. Accessibility to books can make cultural literacy an attainable goal.
4. Creative educational systems and teacher training programs that render after-the-fact packaged critical thinking seminars (for teachers and students) unnecessary. Challenging literature-related, imaginative experiences offered throughout a child's schooling far surpass later-in-life critical thinking remedies. Ongoing literary enrichment should be a requirement for all

those who call themelves educated, for all those who educate, and for all those under the care of educators.

5. Appropriate screening practices for hiring creative teachers at all levels of the educational spectrum. Administrators must know how to recognize superior, imaginative teachers.

Today's world must address complex problems: protection of environment, exploration of space, establishment of world peace. Tomorrow's world will present those challenges and more. Assuredly, minds dulled by repetitive activity and conformity will not solve those problems. Minds imbued with imagination empowered by the intricacies inherent in creativity can find those answers. The future rests on those minds. Preschool literary experiences are a beginning toward that world of enlightenment.

## Dissemination

The results of the practicum were shared first with tne director of the preschool where the PLAY program took place. Secondly, the writer will disseminate practicum information to a principal in another district who, after learning from a third source about the writer's work with Title XX children, had sought advice and strategies for implementing a similar program for elementary pupils. Although this

practicum specifically addressed the preschool level, its message clearly extends as well to elementary-age children and their parents.

The writer has contacted the director of her county library and the coordinator of children's library services in an effort to establish a permanent liaison between child care-centers and the public library. She explained the functions and findings of her practicum and its implications for a long-range affiliation between child-care centers and the library system.

As a follow up to borrowing the grant-earned library of children's literature from the writer's former principal, she reported back to him to express her appreciation for his help and to report the practicum's success. Knowing that the Title XX program had moved to an elementary school and that there would no longer be a need for preschool books at his junior high school, the writer then requested that he donate the minilibrary to a non-profit preschool in the writer's district, where as a result of her work in the doctoral program, the writer was invited to become a board member. The principal, having once been associated with that same preschool, graciously granted her request.

Initiating another parent participation project at the non-profit preschool, the writer will share the results of her practicum using them as a foundation for a pilot project involving the community at large and an extensive, more permanent library services program.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMATIONAL NEWSLETTER:
INTRODUCTION OF PLAY PROGRAM TO PARENTS

Dear Parents/Guardians,

TOPIC: PLAY! Parents as Literacy Advocates for Youngsters!

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Lis has kindly granted me permission to work with your cherubs for about 12 weeks in a special program entitled PLAY!! Like Lis, I am the mother of five children. I am also a teacher in the public school system. This program's primary purpose is to stress the fun of parents' reading to their children and to share with you ideas on the value of play. When my children were younger, I recall some of our happiest times when we were reading together and enjoying a world of make believe. Recently educators have begun to realize the importance of "pretend" play in a young child's life. Starting on Monday, July 18, I will be working at the child-care center providing a minilibrary service for the 3 and 4-year-old youngsters. I am looking for parents who would be willing to agree to read to their child for 10 - 15 minutes each day. Many of you may already be doing this as you read bedtime stories every night. Some of you may find it difficult to get to the library for a variety of books because of the tremendous number of demands on your time. A lending library here at the school will make it easier for you to obtain books.

All you have to do for this program is select a book to take home, read it or part of it to your child/children for 10 - 15 minutes, and let me know which of the books are your favorites and which of the books are your children's favorites. I would also welcome any suggestions for books you would like me to add to the library. I hope you and your children will enjoy many happy hours of reading and that this will be a fun-filled experience for everyone. Before we begin, I would like to know a little bit about you and your children by asking you to name some of your favorite things. Thanks for your cooperation. I am excited about PLAY! and hope you will be too. I look forward to working with you.....

APPENDIX B



SURVEY OF FAVORITES

| | PARENT FAVORITES | CHILD FAVORITES |
|---|---|---|
| FAVORITE COLORS | | |
| 1. | | |
| 2. | | |
| 3. | | |
| 4. | | |
| 5. | | |
| FAVORITE FOODS | | |
| 1. | | |
| 2. | | |
| 3. | | |
| 4. | | |
| 5. | | |
| FAVORITE SHOWS | | |
| 1. | | |
| 2. | | |
| 3. | | |
| 4. | | |
| 5 | | |
| FAVORITE TV STARS | | |
| 1. | | |
| 2. | | |
| 3. | | |
| 4. | | |
| 5. | | |
| FAVORITE MOVIE STARS | | |
| 1. | | |
| 2. | | |
| 3. | | |
| 4. | | |
| 5. | | |
| FAVORITE MAGAZINES (please place an * beside any to which you subscribe) | | |
| 1. | | |
| 2. | | |
| 3. | | |
| 4. | | |
| 5. | | |
| FAVORITE BOOKS | | |
| 1. | | |
| 2. | | |
| 3. | | |
| 4. | | |
| 5. | | |
| FAVORITE AUTHORS | | |
| 1. | | |
| 2. | | |
| 3. | | |
| 4. | | |
| 5. | | |

| PARENT FAVORITES | CHILD FAVORITES |
|---|---|
| FAVORITE INDOOR GAMES | |
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |
| 4. | |
| 5. | |
| FAVORITE OUTDOOR GAMES | |
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |
| 4. | |
| 5. | |
| FAVORITE CITIES | |
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |
| 4. | |
| 5. | |
| FAVORITE PLACES TO VISIT | |
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |
| 4. | |
| 5. | |

HOBBIES?

TALENTS?

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

If you are interested in joining with us in this program, please write your name and the name of your child/children in the space provided below.

Name of parent/guardian: _____

Name of child: _____

Age: _____
Birthdate: _____

APPENDIX C

MINILIBRARY SIGNUP SHEET



MINILIBRARY SIGNUP SHEET FOR BOOKS CHECKED OUT - MANY THANKS!!!

| LAST NAME OF CHILD | BOOK TITLE | DATES: IN/OUT |
|---|---|---|
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APPENDIX D

DAILY/WEEKLY RATING OF FAVORITE BOOKS

NAME OF CHILD: _____

MONDAY DATE_____,1988. READING TIME: _____ MINUTES

BOOK TITLE: _____

AUTHOR: _____

PARENT/GUARDIAN'S RATING (Please circle): FAIR GOOD GREAT SUPER

CHILD'S RATING (Please circle): FAIR GOOD GREAT SUPER

---

TUESDAY DATE_____,1988. READING TIME: _____ MINUTES

BOOK TITLE: _____

AUTHOR: _____

PARENT/GUARDIAN'S RATING (Please circle): FAIR GOOD GREAT SUPER

CHILD'S RATING (Please circle): FAIR GOOD GREAT SUPER

---

WEDNESDAY DATE_____,1988. READING TIME: _____ MINUTES

BOOK TITLE: _____

AUTHOR: _____

PARENT/GUARDIAN'S RATING (Please circle): FAIR GOOD GREAT SUPER

CHILD'S RATING (Please circle): FAIR GOOD GREAT SUPER

---

THURSDAY DATE_____,1988. READING TIME: _____ MINUTES

BOOK TITLE: _____

AUTHOR: _____

PARENT/GUARDIAN'S RATING (Please circle): FAIR GOOD GREAT SUPER

CHILD'S RATING (Please circle): FAIR GOOD GREAT SUPER

---

FRIDAY DATE_____,1988. READING TIME: _____ MINUTES

BOOK TITLE: _____

AUTHOR: _____

PARENT/GUARDIAN'S RATING (Please circle): FAIR GOOD GREAT SUPER

CHILD'S RATING (Please circle): FAIR GOOD GREAT SUPER

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SATURDAY DATE_____,1988. READING TIME: _____ MINUTES

BOOK TITLE: _____

AUTHOR: _____

PARENT/GUARDIAN'S RATING (Please circle): FAIR GOOD GREAT SUPER

CHILD'S RATING (Please circle): FAIR GOOD GREAT SUPER

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SUNDAY DATE_____,1988. READING TIME: _____ MINUTES

BOOK TITLE: _____

AUTHOR: _____

PARENT/GUARDIAN'S RATING (Please circle): FAIR GOOD GREAT SUPER

CHILD'S RATING (Please circle): FAIR GOOD GREAT SUPER

---

FAVORITE BOOK OF THE WEEK: _____

APPENDIX E

INFORMATIONAL NEWSLETTER: PLAY RESEARCH

PLAY PROGRAM - INFORMATIONAL NEWSLETTER
PARENTS AS LITERACY ADVOCATES FOR YOUNGSTERS

TOPIC: PLAY RESEARCH

Dear Parents, Grandparents, Guardians,

DO YOU THINK LIKE THE EXPERTS? PLEASE READ FURTHER.

PLAY -- often referred to as the "work" of children -- fulfills a valuable role in a child's daily life. Children who are guided toward CREATIVE PLAY will reap great rewards in terms of intellectual, social, and emotional growth.

The PLAY program here has been emphasizing PLAY as it relates to children's literature and literacy-related experiences, a focusing on imagination, expression of verbal skills, and overall nurturing of your youngsters' creativity.

Below is a list of experts (educators, child psychologists, social scientists) who have studied and written about the topic of PLAY. I have included the specific area in which each of the researchers specializes along with a brief suggestion on how you can use their ideas in playing with your children. Many of you may have been engaging in this type of PLAY with your child/children all along. If so, you can pat yourself on the back. CONSIDER YOURSELF AN EXPERT!!

1. Play as meaningful conversations between adults and children (Isenberg & Jacobs, 1982). Try to find time when you're not rushed to have good talks with your child; good conversations may often take place in the car when you are alone together.

2. Play as the development of creativity from listening skills (Gray & Chanoff, 1984). Successful school experiences related to listening skills involve reading and writing activities and a child's ability to concentrate. Reading to your child and carrying on good conversations with your child help build listening skills. Furthermore, listening to your child shows him/her how to listen to you and others. Above all, it's FUN! After our storytimes, I have enjoyed listening to your children. They love an audience, and I have been intrigued by what they have had to say.

3. Play as creative storytelling stemming from the use of picture books (Greaney, 1986). As your child looks at picture books, a little prompting from you can produce some fascinating stories rooted in your child's imagination. Children are the most exuberant storytellers. They never cease to amaze me!

4. Play as reading in the home (Ninio & Bruner, 1978; Neuman & Prowda, 1982). Reading is always a great adventure! Children engage in play as they listen to stories and become entranced in their wonderment. I like to call it a FROLIC OF THE MIND!

5. Play and parent storytelling using children's literature as a catalyst (Singer & Singer, 1985). Here's where you show off your creativity. Several of you have told me how much you enjoy telling stories to your children and what wonderful memories you have of a favorite storyteller from your own childhood. If you haven't tried this yet, you're in for a treat. You will be entertaining a truly captive audience, and you will be a superstar with your kids!

6. Play as reading aloud and role playing (Trelease, 1982). By reading aloud to your child, you can be providing the greatest of all play. Just look at your child's face and see those wide eyes, happy smiles, looks of amazement, and a full range of expressions. Behind those angelic faces, the wheels of imagination are in full gear. Every time you change your voice to sound like one of the characters, you are using role playing. Children love it. They too get right into the act without any self-consciousness. As you may have noticed, they are natural actors. Remember, "The play is the thing!"

7. Play as fantasizing (Wolfgang & Sanders, 1981; Egan, 1985; Dehouske, 1982) When children are exercising their imaginative powers, they are creating their own play which can entertain them for hours on end.

8. Play as make believe (Isenberg & Jacobs, 1982). Pretending is one of the most delightful of childhood activities. Think back not so long ago to some of your own favorite pretend activities.

9. Solitary play (Isenberg & Jacobs, 1982). It is important for children to be able to play alone. Imagination is the key to enjoyable solitary play. As you observe your children in safe solitary play, you will notice a contentment within themselves which helps them to become independent. As children become better able to occupy themselves, you will find yourself with more free time, and you will be hearing less and less that all too familiar phrase, "Mommy, Mommy, what can I do now???"

10. Cooperative play (Adcock & Segal, 1983). Active imaginations lead to wonderful cooperative play wherein children are able to get along well enjoying each other's company without selfish disagreements. Ideally, children can play in harmony without the need for adult interference. Several of you have mentioned to me how well your children play with each other after storytime at home.

If you would like to read articles on PLAY by any of the above-named educators, I can locate them for you. Again, thanks for your cooperation.

HAVE FUN AT PLAY AND HAPPY READING!!

APPENDIX F

INFORMATIONAL NEWSLETTER:
FIRST-WEEK PLAY PROGRAM UPDATE

PLAY ! REPORT
PARENTS AS LITERACY ADVOCATES FOR YOUNGSTERS
28 JULY, 1988

DEAR PARENTS/GRANDPARENTS/GUARDIANS,

Thank you for your enthusiastic cooperation during the first week of PLAY! I am thrilled with the response. More than 100 books were checked out for reading at home, and all of the teachers used the new minilibrary for story time here at KK. If you are the parent of a 3 or 4-year-old and haven't as yet picked up your child's book bag, it is hanging up on a hook in the vestibule. If you did not receive a folder with the book rating sheets, they are located in the bookcase. (Some have names already on them.) The program began with the 3 and 4 year-old age group, but since parents of children in other age groups have expressed interest, it is open to them as well. Please let me know if you need materials to get started.

Some of you have begun to turn in your book rating sheets. As you start doing that regularly, just put them in the basket near the back wall; most of you have been returning the books in the basket toward the front, and that has been working out well. Some of you have requested rating sheets which cover the weekend days. Those new sheets will be available to you Friday on the top shelf of the bookcase near the book signout sheet. Again, thanks for requesting them, and I know your cherubs are reaping wonderful reading/nurturing rewards. This week's FAVORITE BOOKS were the CURIOUS GEORGE books. The children always seem to delight in that monkey's antics. In general I will be signing out books from 3:30 - 5:00 on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, but you are welcome to sign out your own at any other time.

MANY MANY THANKS to Lis and her staff -- especially Brenda, Judy, and Kim and my two young assistant librarians, Ashley and Michelle, who have been organizing the books so nicely.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX G

INFORMATIONAL NEWSLETTER:
MIDPOINT PLAY PROGRAM UPDATE

PLAY ! REPORT
PARENTS AS LITERACY ADVOCATES FOR YOUNGSTERS
6 SEPTEMBER, 1988

DEAR PARENTS/GRANDPARENTS/GUARDIANS,

We are now about midpoint in our 12-week PLAY program designed to help promote reading in the home and nurture creative play activities for your youngsters. I have enjoyed talking to you and listening to you share some of the many amusing story-related exeriences you have been observing. Your active participation with the project has been rewarding to me as well as to the children. You are certainly true ADVOCATES for the cause of LITERACY. As the children continue to request books, I see them as becoming ADVOCATES on their own behalf. Thanks again to Lis and her staff for including storytimes each day.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX H

FINAL SURVEY:
FAVORITE BOOKS AND AUTHORS

PLAY: PARENTS AS LITERACY ADVOCATES FOR YOUNGSTERS

CHILD'S NAME: _____ AGE: _____

FAVORITE CHILDREN'S AUTHOR/S_____

_____

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FAVORITE CHILDREN'S BOOK/S_____

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!!

HAPPY READING!!!

APPENDIX I

INFORMATIONAL NEWSLETTER:
APPRECIATION OF PARENT PARTICIPATION

PLAY ! REPORT
PARENTS AS LITERACY ADVOCATES FOR YOUNGSTERS

1 November, 1988

DEAR PARENTS/GRANDPARENTS/GUARDIANS,

As you know, the official 12-week PLAY program ended with the month of October. Because I have enjoyed being with your children so much, I will continue to visit the preschool on a regular basis up until the Christmas vacation. With the coming of the New Year, I will be making visits about once a week. I will be able to leave the books for the children until the end of June. Many of you have inquired about getting more books. I am investigating the possibilities of locating funds for a permanent mini-library so that you and your children can continue to have easy access to books. When I have new information on that subject, I will provide you with an update.

Program results have been extremely positive. Your cooperation and that of all preschool personnel have made the program a success. All of the objectives have been met. Most rewarding to me and to the children is your acceptance of the goals of the program and your intention to continue implementing them after the official 12-week calendar plan. The program's long-range success depends on continuing parent participation in your children's intellectual, social, and emotional growth. I am pleased that the minilibrary has provided so many hours of reading fun. I know you will enjoy many, many more. Cherish these early childhood years; they really do fly by; one thing is certain: your teenagers of tomorrow are off to a great start!

AGAIN, THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT AND HAPPY READING!